Nutrients in the 1980s — Constraints on our Knowledge

Proceedings of the Western Hemisphere Nutrition Congress VI (August 1980)

Progress in Clinical and Biological Research; volume 67

Edited by N. Selvey and P.L. White

Alan R. Liss; New York, 1981
xviii + 602 pages. £54.40

This title is very misleading – it apparently promises the considered opinions of experts on currently outstanding problems in the field of nutrition whereas, in fact, it is simply the theme title (and such titles rarely do express the theme) of the Proceedings of a Conference.

Selected section titles indicate the subject matter. After 4 plenary lectures on general topics the first section deals with the well-worn topic of food intake and nutritional status – subjects fairly covered in every undergraduate course. Certainly this topic represents constraints on knowledge but discussions of dietary recall, weighed food intakes, and so on, their advantages and drawbacks, form the standard BSc. question. A Report of the US Food Survey of 1977–78 is hardly a topic for the future, and compared poorly with the annual UK surveys.

Five papers on nutritional status in the western hemisphere and another on 'Establishing National Health Priorities' are hardly exciting.

Nor is it very forward-looking to discuss obstacles to success in nutrition intervention under headings such as 'Diversity of Scientific Opinion', 'Ineffective Communications' and 'Inadequate Storage and Distribution Systems'.

This is not to say that this is not a useful textbook of nutrition but it simply adds one more to the many that are available, just as do so many other Congresses – it is the title of the book that leads to the disappointment.

A.E. Bender

Diagnosis of Organic Acidemias by Gas Chromatography–Mass Spectrometry

Laboratory and Research Methods in Biology and Medicine; volume 6

Edited by Stephan I. Goodman and Sandford P. Markey

Alan R. Liss; New York, 1981
xii + 158 pages. £19.10

Organic acids are intermediates in many metabolic pathways. When an inborn error of metabolism leads to a specific enzyme defect involving an acid as substrate, the acid accumulates in the blood and can be detected in the urine. The urinary profiles on the various organic acidaemias are highly diagnostic and their interpretation yields valuable clinical information. The ability of gas chromatography–mass spectrometry to achieve resolution of complex mixtures together with chemical identification of the individual components makes it the ideal technique for the diagnosis of these